

DECEMBER 9, 1976

Two severe cold spells have iced the Shortgrass Country back into a burned grassland far short of the promises of the wet season of September and October. Cattle's hair seemed to lose the flush autumn sheen overnight. Pasture scenes changed from complacent herds to bawling, sack-broke cows once again demanding their winter handouts.

Ducks and geese passed over, going to Mexico. Gentle squirrels in the front yard completed the last of the pecans. Along the draws, small predators made frantic attacks on the hackberries. Around the coffee houses, men talked of deer hunting and the Dallas football team.

I stayed at the ranch to plan the next few months. When last year's fireplace wood is burned, I'm going to move my family to the Gulf Coast. The exact location will be 60 miles from the nearest frost line, thence due south 200 miles from the closest auction ring.

No feed troughs or corrals are going to be necessary to fish from the wharves. Instead of butane trucks supplying the fuel, warm gulf tides will wash in the drift wood.

Child Who Sits in the Sun can utilize her nervous energy gathering mussels and shells from the beach. Sea weeds, I've read, contain sufficient nutrients. Under the spell of the endless sea, I'm sure the boys will forget goat meat and beans.

Shelter is going to be the easiest part. Beachcombers' houses are called quaint instead of shacky. In all the years that we have lived in a split level house, the plumbing received more attention than the owners. I plan a lean-to that is self cleaning. What blows in can blow out.

The nearest thing to my former craft will be thinking of sperm whales in terms of cows and bulls. Nearest thing to saying farewell to the ranch will be drawing out a-d-i-o-s in the sand with the edge of a beer can.

You'll get lonesome for your old friends, you say. Hah! Last night I called one of those old friends you think I'll miss to borrow a half gallon of fruit cake moistener to liven the Yule season for some unfortunate neighbors. He refused. Refused in the same harsh way that he refused to loan me 16 cups of beer to bake bread for the elderly during the Labor Day weekend.

The kind of people that I am going to meet on the coast will drink from double handled loving cups. I won't have to beg to be charitable. You've seen the movies of open handed sailors buying drinks for the house. Once I learn to bake at sea level, I'll have real brandy and imported ale to prepare gifts for the needy.

I won't miss a thing. Tears don't rot unused saddles and headstalls. I know an ex-cowboy who now works in the oilfield. Were he to get to longing for the old days, he could go buy himself a silver mounted saddle to soften the pain. If he got to feeling too sad, he could hire a private band to play Home on the Range all night long right in his backyard.

I may take one pair of spurs along to help fill my sea chest. Other than that, when the wood is burned, I'm heading south.